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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION POLLING PLANS

REF: A. SECSTATE 62422
[1](#)B. KABUL 1557
[1](#)C. KABUL 1506

[1](#)1. This is the sixth in a series of cables updating and providing additional details on Embassy plans and efforts in support of the Afghan presidential and provincial council elections, per the request in reftel. This cable addresses post efforts on pre-election polling.

IRI Elections Polls

[1](#)2. USAID will sponsor two nationwide polls through IRI, similar to the one released in mid-June. IRI plans to have the polls in the field (approximately 60 questions each with a sample size of around 3,200) during July and will present them before August 20th. In conjunction with these polls, IRI is sponsoring two focus groups in July and will present the results in August. IRI uses the polling company Williams and Associates which works with Lapis Research and Kabul Group to conduct their fieldwork. Potential IRI focus group topics are undetermined at this point.

[1](#)3. In the event of a runoff, IRI plans to run one nationwide poll and one focus group before the second round of voting in October. Both the poll and the focus group will be similar to those described above. At this time, IRI has no polling planned for 2010 parliamentary elections.

Glevum Elections Research & Focus Groups

[1](#)4. Using an existing contract for election support with IFES, USAID is also sponsoring two Glevum Associates nationwide polls using the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) to conduct the fieldwork. The Glevum polls will include samples of 3,400 Afghans and approximately 20 questions. The questionnaire covers presidential candidate ratings and favorability, provincial issues, provincial council role, local governance and influence, and the perception of credible, secure, and inclusive polling. Both surveys will go to the field in July, two-weeks apart. Glevum will return the results of the first poll on August 5. It will return the second poll on August 15. The Glevum poll will also have an educational aspect, since the pollsters will use a paper in the style of the ballot to show candidates' pictures and symbols to elicit favorability ratings of each candidate.

[1](#)5. Glevum will also run eight focus groups in mostly Pashtun dominated provinces: Farah, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Ghazni, Zabul, Paktika, and Nangarhar. The Glevum focus groups will bring shura members from several districts

together to talk about regional issues, potential solutions, and relevant candidate platforms. The Pashtun regions were selected because of their strong support for Karzai in the last election, IRI assessed decline in support for Karzai, and perceived influence in the coming election as the dominant ethnic group. Glevum focus groups will be conducted in July with results available during the first week of August.

INR Elections Polling

¶6. State/Intelligence and Research (INR) will conduct two nationwide polls (4,000 and 6,000 respondents) before the election. Results from INR's June survey, conducted by ACSOR, will be available in late July. It includes open questions about presidential candidates and favorability ratings for several candidates and non candidates. Results from INR's July survey will be available in early August. The July questionnaire remains in development but will include roughly 40 closed-ended and 10 open-ended questions. INR will likely award the July contract to either ACSOR or the Opinion Research Center of Afghanistan (ORCA) to conduct fieldwork. For all of its surveys, INR obtains the data sets from the field firm and analyzes the results internally.

Other Polling

¶7. ISAF's Afghanistan Assessments Group (AAG) expects the
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return of its nationwide quarterly survey in early July. The survey covers a range of issues beyond elections but includes questions about voter registration and likelihood of voting on August 20. RC-East is conducting regional elections polling and expects the results in July. This poll includes a question about the extent to which the respondent will support the elected government if their preferred candidate does not win.

¶8. CSTC-A is also conducting nationwide polling focused on security and related to the ISAF AAG poll. It also includes some elections registration and process questions. Its results are expected in mid-August.

¶9. USAID also sponsors The Asia Foundation poll, which is an annual poll of overall conditions in Afghanistan focused on attitudes toward democracy and rule of law. Although the poll will be in the field throughout the summer, its results are not expected until October 2009.

¶10. The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) will conduct a nationwide survey (of approximately 2,200 Afghans) in September focused on political views and media use. The BBG works with Intermedia to supervise their surveys, which in turn works with a local field firm (in the past, ACSOR) to conduct its fieldwork. BBG expects results from its next survey in early October. In case of a second round of elections, the poll will likely cover elections topics.

¶11. Gallup will also conduct a national survey in July, supposedly including elections topics. They have used ORCA for previous surveys. Discussions with UNAMA, UNDP-ELECT, and other diplomatic mission staff in Kabul reveals no additional polling plans are currently in place in advance of the election.

Polling Companies & Capabilities

¶12. There are several polling companies, of varying capabilities, operating in Afghanistan: 1. The Afghan Center

for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR Surveys or ACSOR) based in Kabul and managed by D3 Systems Inc. in Vienna, Virginia; 2. Opinion Research Center of Afghanistan (ORCA) based in Kabul; and 3. Williams and Associates, based in Salem, Massachusetts, which works with Lapis Research, based in the U.S. and Kabul Group, based in Kabul.

¶13. ACSOR has carried out the bulk of the nationwide surveys in Afghanistan since 2004. ORCA, which is run and staffed by several former ACSOR employees, has worked most recently with Gallup. Kabul Group has focused mainly on qualitative research in the past, but is currently developing its nationwide survey capacity in conjunction with Williams and Associates and Lapis Research. This consortium is associated with Moby Media.

¶14. Each firm has local, full-time employees familiar with the area and rely on both male and female interviewers to obtain more comprehensive coverage. Each firm translates questionnaires into Pashto and Dari to conduct interviews face-to-face in respondents' homes using their local interviewers who are familiar with the local dialect and culture. However, the firms' sampling, interviewer training, quality control procedures, questionnaire design, and data entry and cleaning capacities differ.

Evaluating Polls

¶15. Although public opinion surveys in Afghanistan are increasing in sophistication and number, many challenges remain for conducting surveys that meet international standards. Beyond routine research challenges such as methodology or sample design, key obstacles in Afghanistan include limited on-the-ground experience with survey research; extensive damage to infrastructure (roads/telecommunication) which impedes access to the rural population; insecurity/violence; a high level of illiteracy; and cultural and religious values that sometimes hinder access to women, promote biased (regional or ethnic) or socially desirable responses. Exacerbating the difficulty of designing and evaluating studies is the lack of definitive population data, as Afghanistan has not conducted a national census since 1979.

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